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April 15, 2021

Re: LD 415 Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services To Increase MaineCare Reimbursement Rates for Targeted Case Management Services To Reflect Inflation

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM, the largest supportive housing provider for homeless populations in Maine. Our staff of 11 works collaboratively with more than 50 different service provider organizations to effectively and efficiently house some 1100 of Maine's most vulnerable people. I am also a member of the Statewide Homeless Council and serve as President of the Maine Continuum of Care Board of Directors.

I am testifying today on behalf of CHOM and the Maine Homeless Policy Committee in support of LD 415, which would increase the reimbursement rate for targeted case management (TCM) services to reflect cost increases from 2010 to 2020.

The reduced rates over the past decade have made it progressively harder for providers to hire and retain direct care staff and case managers, who are the nexus of where the system of care meets people experiencing homelessness, people with behavioral health needs, and for people with substance use disorder (SUD). Section 13 is one of the primary tools we have to provide case management services to these populations. Case managers and direct care workers, the people who provide these essential case management and community integration services for people with mental health issues, including people with the highest acuity and people experiencing homelessness, need to be paid enough to stay. They need to be paid enough to be able to work in the field.

And, providers need to be able to keep their doors open while paying a wage high enough to accomplish this. The current rate, though improved in recent years, is not yet sustainable for Section 13 providers to succeed in hiring and retaining staff, and this ultimately hurts the recipients of needed services. Despite the great need, agencies can only lose money for so long before it becomes completely untenable to provide services. This bill is a major step in rebalancing things. The situation has become dire for the remaining providers of Section 13 services across the state, especially amid the pandemic – this bill would help cure this and ensure that these sorely needed services remain available for our most vulnerable neighbors.

Homelessness is a major public health crisis, and affordable housing is healthcare. Investing in housing stability for Maine people creates a foundation to help Mainers rebuild better from the pandemic. We lacked resources before the pandemic and now we are seeing increased demand. This bill is part of a continuum of legislation that addresses housing needs in Maine, from access to safe emergency housing and supportive services, to rental assistance and housing production. These bills work in synch with each other to end and prevent homelessness.

Please support LD 415, so that we can ensure TCM providers across Maine can continue to provide critical services to people experiencing homelessness, people with behavioral health needs, and for people with SUD.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.